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CENTRAL AMERICA: THE PEACE PROCESS

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CENTRAL AMERICA: THE PEACE PROCESS

ISSUE DEFINITION

The people of Central America, together with their neighbours and friends, have been striving for years to bring about a lasting peace in the region. Years of conflict have left the social and economic infrastructures damaged, and the difficult task of reconciling the antagonists is by no means completed. This paper gives an overview of the work done so far to bring peace to Central America and indicates the Canadian contribution to this process.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

A. The Contadora Peace Initiative

Long before the war between the Sandinistas and Contras began in Nicaragua, Central America was grappling with social and political unrest. The region's economic difficulties, exacerbated by natural disasters and the consequent disruptive effect on agricultural exports, accentuated divisions between the ruling classes and the poor, and contributed to the creation of rebel groups. The reconciliation of the different sectors of society was not made any easier by the lack of democratic government in all the countries except Costa Rica. In El Salvador the government was overthrown in 1979 and the country plunged into civil war, with right-wing death squads confronting Marxist rebels and those suspected of sympathizing with them. In Nicaragua, the fall of the Somoza government the same year enabled the Sandinistas, who quickly showed the Marxist leanings of their government, to take power. Relations with

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the United States deteriorated and in 1981 the Reagan administration, suspecting that the Sandinistas were helping the Salvadoran guerrillas, committed itself to supporting the Nicaraguan "Contras" in their fight against the Sandinista government. Since the Contras launched their attacks from bases in Costa Rica and Honduras, Nicaragua's neighbours inevitably found themselves involved in a regional conflict. Indeed, no country in or around Central America could avoid the resulting economic consequences and refugee problems. In view of the region's economic and social deterioration and the involvement of major world powers, a number of neighbouring countries decided to launch a peace initiative.

In January 1983, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama met on the Panamanian island of Contadora to discuss ways of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in the region. The "Contadora group" demanded the withdrawal of foreign forces, the suspension of foreign military assistance, and a greater degree of economic cooperation between Central American countries. With the backing of the Lima support group, created in 1985 by Brazil, Peru, Argentina and Uruguay, and with the encouragement of a number of other countries, including Canada, the Contadora group began talks with Central American governments and the United States to reach an agreement for achieving peace. Tensions between Nicaragua and the United States and the complexity of the region's problems hindered the negotiation of such an agreement. Nevertheless, the discussions, to which Canada made a major contribution, were useful in establishing appropriate verification and control mechanisms which could be used if a peace agreement was reached. By 1986, however, it was widely felt that the Contadora initiative had run out of steam.

It was suddenly reactivated in November 1986 with the revelation of U.S. arms sales to Iran and allegations of funds from such sales being diverted to help the Contras. Doubts concerning the Reagan administration's policy of aid to the Contras altered the balance of the situation in Latin America, yet the Contadora group quickly realized that the countries of Central America were not ready to accept its proposals. In view of this deadlock, the members of the group were at a loss as to how they might contribute to restoring peace in the region.

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B. The Arias Peace Plan

1. Signing the Peace Accord

The Central American presidents, however, did not give up hope of ending a conflict which since 1979 had caused 45,000 deaths in Nicaragua and 60,000 in El Salvador. In February 1987, less than a month after the most recent failure of the Contadora initiative, the Presidents of Costa Rica, Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras met in San José, Costa Rica, to discuss a plan for a regional peace conference. The President of Nicaragua was conspicuous by his absence, but the other participants invited him to attend the proposed conference to study a new peace plan put forward by the President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias Sanchez, which was more precise and concise than the Contadora plan. The Arias plan provided for a cease-fire, negotiations between the governments concerned and the non-armed opposition, suspension of aid to the rebels, an amnesty and steps to achieve greater democracy. Negotiations for the reduction of regular and rebel forces were to begin 60 days after the agreement was signed.

The five presidents had already met in May 1986 at Esquipulas, Guatemala, to study the Contadora plan, but had not reached agreement on any proposals, except the one made by the President of Guatemala regarding the election of a regional parliament. There was considerable enthusiasm, particularly in international circles, at the prospect of the five presidents meeting again. However, the situation deteriorated in El Salvador and Nicaragua, where the Contras were increasing their attacks, and by June 1987, the Arias plan seemed to be going the same way as the Contadora initiative.

Despite the uncertainty, the five Central American presidents met on 6 and 7 August, 1987 at Ciudad, Guatemala. On 7 August 1987, to everyone's surprise, the five presidents signed a peace agreement known as the Esquipulas II Accord (sometimes referred to as the Guatemala Accord). Although vague in some respects, the peace accord reiterated the main points of the Arias plan but changed the timetable for the implementation of the provisions. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central American countries were to meet within 15 days of the agreement's signature to discuss the cease-fire in detail and examine other issues, and within

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90 days to assess the progress achieved. Within 120 days they were to meet members of the Contadora group and its support group to set up an international control commission assigned to examine implementation of the agreement. Within 150 days the five Central American presidents were to meet to assess implementation of the agreement at the regional level. Meanwhile, in each country racked by internal conflict, a national reconciliation commission comprising government representatives, opposition parties and religious groups was to be set up to examine implementation of the agreement in that particular country.

2. Nicaragua and Implementation of the Accord

By signing the agreement, the five Central American countries committed themselves to making the compromises needed to maintain the impetus of the peace process, but they were counting primarily on concessions by Nicaragua, which wanted peace in the face of an increasingly difficult economic situation which was largely the result of the war against the Contras. In September 1987, Nicaragua announced that the newspaper *La Prensa* and *Radio Catolica*, the radio station of the Catholic Church, could resume operations - something which would have been unthinkable a few months earlier. Some Sandinistas thought these concessions were enough, but the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to President Arias for his work to restore peace in the region added to his influence when he exhorted Nicaragua to respect the agreement. The Sandinista government therefore relented and on 5 November, shortly before the deadline, announced that it was ready to negotiate a cease-fire with the Contras.

Despite this statement, Nicaragua was not yet fully complying with the provisions of the agreement, nor indeed were most Central American countries. In early 1988, however, when the five Central American presidents were preparing to assess the implementation of the agreement after 150 days, they were concerned mainly about the situation in Nicaragua, which was in fact not very encouraging. President Arias did not hesitate to criticize both the Sandinistas and the Contras for the harm they were doing to the peace process. Such criticism had the desired effect and, at the summit meeting of the Central American presidents on 15 and 16 January 1988, Nicaragua's President Ortega announced that the state

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of emergency limiting political rights in his country would be lifted and his government was ready to begin direct negotiations with the Contras.

3. The Peace Process after the Sapoa Agreement

Faced with an economic situation which was going from bad to worse, the Sandinistas could hardly afford to avoid direct negotiations with the Contras if they had any hope of putting an end to this costly war. The Contras also had little choice but to take part in direct negotiations since their situation was becoming increasingly precarious. Thus, on 23 March 1988, the Sandinista government and the Contras signed an agreement which provided for a 60-day cease-fire to take effect on 1 April, specified the areas of Nicaragua where the Contras could remain, and stipulated that the Contras were not to request or receive military aid from the United States. In return, the Sandinistas would grant an amnesty to political prisoners and guarantee freedom of speech for the people of Nicaragua, as required under the Esquipulas II Accord of August 1987.

On 7 April 1988, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the five Central American countries unofficially invited Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany and Spain, who had all expressed an interest in this matter, to develop a verification and control mechanism which could be used if the governments and rebels in the region reached a final peace agreement. In the spring of 1988, however, the situation was far from conducive to the establishment of such a mechanism. Nevertheless, the people of Central America were determined to find their own solutions to the problems in their region, as can be seen by the refusal of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central American countries, at their meeting in Guatemala in early August 1988, to condemn Nicaragua, as was the wish of the U.S. government.

C. Reactivation of the Peace Process

1. Effects of New International Context

Shortly after the United States presidential elections, the Central American presidents agreed to hold a summit meeting in early 1989. In anticipation of the presidential summit, the foreign ministers of the

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five Central American countries were able to agree to formally request the United Nations to establish a peacekeeping force for their region. When the five presidents met in Costa Del Sol in El Salvador on 13 and 14 February 1989, they agreed to demobilize the Contras based in Honduras, giving themselves 90 days to devise a plan to carry out this undertaking. In exchange for this initiative, Nicaragua agreed to implement political reforms and to hold free and fair elections by 26 February 1990.

The international community greeted with enthusiasm the positive results of the presidential summit. The release by Nicaragua on 17 March of 1,894 former members of the National Guard and the announcement of electoral reforms, in keeping with commitments made at the Costa Del Sol summit, augured well for Nicaragua's continued participation in the peace process.

Meanwhile, El Salvador faced mounting difficulties. The government and the rebels failed to move any closer to negotiations and the rebels called for a boycott of the elections and launched attacks against government targets. Voting took place amid chaotic conditions caused by a rebel ban on road transport and attacks on power stations and other facilities. Only about half of the eligible voters went to the polling stations, but the right-wing ARENA candidate, Alfredo Cristiani, won more than half of the votes cast. On 1 June 1989, at his inauguration as President, Cristiani announced his intention to open negotiations with the FMLN rebels.

In Nicaragua, the campaign for the February 1990 elections, which had officially begun on 25 April 1989, proceeded without too much difficulty as a number of opposition leaders returned to Nicaragua from exile. Despite internal tensions, the National Opposition Union or UNO (Spanish acronym), a coalition of most of the opposition parties, in September selected its candidate for the presidential elections, Mrs. Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of the editor of the *La Prensa* newspaper who was assassinated in 1978.

While the Nicaraguan election campaign proceeded apace, the five Central American presidents met in Tela, Honduras to discuss the demobilization of the Contras. On 7 August 1989, they announced that they

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had reached agreement on a demobilization plan and requested that the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) establish an International Support and Verification Commission or CIAV (Spanish acronym) to supervise the demobilization. The Tela Declaration also asked for the deployment of military observers to monitor the border between Honduras and Nicaragua as part of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America or ONUCA (Spanish acronym).

A few weeks after the successful summit meeting, there were promising developments in the internal situation in El Salvador. On 5 September 1989, the FMLN rebels announced their acceptance of a government proposal for peace negotiations. After preliminary talks, the government and the FMLN announced on 15 September 1989 that they had reached agreement on a negotiating process which would feature monthly meetings between the two sides. The first scheduled monthly meeting between the Salvadorean government and the FMLN took place on 16-18 October. However, hopes for a negotiated settlement appeared dashed when FMLN guerrillas attacked San Salvador on 11 November. Pitched battles were fought in the capital for most of November, with numerous casualties among the civilian population. The murder of prominent Jesuits increased international dismay at the turn of events.

By December 1989, fighting in San Salvador had diminished, with the FMLN guerrillas withdrawing in the face of stiff resistance by the army. The five Central American presidents held an emergency summit meeting to salvage the peace process on 11-12 December 1989 in San Isidro de Coronado in Costa Rica. They agreed on a declaration calling for an end to the violence in the region and asking insurgent movements to negotiate. The presidents also reaffirmed the role of the United Nations in the peace process. Thus, when the first soldiers of the ONUCA observer force began to arrive in Honduras in early December, the peace process in Central America was still proceeding as scheduled, but the events of October and November had demonstrated how fragile it was.

2. Effects of Nicaraguan Elections

During the first weeks of the new year, most of the attention was focused on the Nicaraguan elections slated for 25 February

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1990. There were some violent clashes between Sandinista and opposition supporters, but the election campaign, observed by representatives from various countries including Canada, proceeded in a fair and orderly fashion. The campaign of the National Opposition Union (UNO), led by Mrs. Chamorro, often appeared disorganized when compared to that waged by President Ortega and the Sandinistas. The results of the election, however, caught everyone by surprise. Mrs. Chamorro, with about 55% of the vote, defeated President Ortega in the presidential race. The UNO won 52 of the 90 seats in the National Assembly. Because of the decisive victory of the opposition in a fair process and the fear of renewed fighting with the Contras, the Sandinistas agreed to proceed with the change of government.

The defeat of the Sandinistas gave the peace process in the region a new lease on life and the United States took measures to remove its economic embargo against Nicaragua. The five Central American presidents, including Mr. Ortega, who was slated to remain president until 25 April, met in Nicaragua on 2-3 April and agreed to encourage the Contras to disarm quickly. The hopes for peace in the region were bolstered the following day, when representatives of the Salvadorean government and of the FMLN agreed, at a meeting in Geneva, to resume peace negotiations.

On 19 April 1990, the Sandinistas and the Contras finally signed a cease-fire agreement which cleared the way for the new government. The months which followed featured continued tensions between the government and the Sandinistas, but on 28 June 1990, the Contra leaders surrendered their weapons to President Chamorro, thereby completing the demobilization of the Contras and to all intents and purposes putting an end to the civil war in Nicaragua.

The economic and human costs of the war complicates Nicaragua's economic recovery and the austerity measures the government considers necessary may lead to continued turmoil. Indeed, there are still deep divisions within the Nicaraguan population, a situation which complicates President Chamorro's efforts to rebuild the country's economy.

In trying to avoid antagonizing the Sandinistas, President Chamorro only succeeded in upsetting her own supporters. In June 1991,

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just after the Sandinistas' defeat in elections, she introduced legislation to overturn laws they had passed in April 1990, and which allowed them to keep confiscated property. The Sandinista representatives in the National Assembly walked out, while the former President, Daniel Ortega, defiantly resisted demands that he leave a confiscated house he had purchased for a very small sum of money.

Progress was made, however, in ending the violence in some parts of the country involving Sandinista supporters and former Contra rebels. On 25 June 1991, Daniel Ortega met former rebel leaders and an agreement was reached on the measures to be taken to disarm civilians and resolve land disputes.

3. Reduced Regional Tensions

a) Guatemala

Progress was made in other countries of Central America after the Nicaraguan elections, tensions throughout the region diminishing considerably after the Sandinistas' fall from power. Representatives from the Guatemalan coordinating committee of agricultural, commercial, industrial and financial associations and from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, a rebel group, met in Ottawa on 31 August 1990 in one of a series of meetings held outside Guatemala in order to find ways of ending the civil war in that country. Nevertheless, the Guatemalan public was dissatisfied with the progress made in ending the civil war and in improving the economy, with the result that the governing party, the Christian Democrats, suffered a defeat in the legislative elections held on 11 November. Since no candidate won a clear majority in the presidential elections, a second round was held on 6 January 1991 and Jorge Serrano won over 60% of the vote. Serrano is more right-wing than the previous president, but in past years, he has encouraged peace talks with the rebels.

In April 1991, representatives of the Guatemalan government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity rebel group held their first official meeting in Mexico City. On 27 April, it was announced that an agreement had been reached to pursue negotiations for bringing about a

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peaceful resolution of the conflict. On 16 June 1991, government representatives and the rebel group opened formal peace negotiations in Mexico and on 25 July signed a statement on the measures needed to ensure democracy. Meanwhile, Guatemala finally recognized, on 5 September 1991, that the neighbouring country of Belize is an independent state, a move which might prevent a crisis over the border dispute between the two countries.

Tensions within the country remain high, however, with many citizens being tortured and killed by death squads. In February 1992, the United Nations released a report which condemned the human rights situation in Guatemala and the UN's Human Rights Commission considered adding the country to the list of the world's worst human rights violators. On 9 April 1992, the European Parliament passed a resolution protesting against the frequent murders and the torture of street children in Guatemala and called on European governments to help human-rights workers in the country. Despite international pressure, however, human rights abuses continued and tensions within Guatemala increased. A rash of bombings in May raised fears that the military was preparing to launch a coup.

b) El Salvador

The situation in El Salvador has also been marked by dramatic events. The series of discussions between the Salvadorean government and the FMLN that ended on 18 September 1990 failed to produce an agreement on a cease-fire and the situation worsened in November when FMLN rebels launched attacks against military installations. At their summit meeting on 15-17 December 1990, however, the five Central American presidents condemned the actions of the FMLN and called for a cease-fire.

The Salvadorean government and the FMLN resumed negotiations in February 1991 and made considerable progress, reaching agreement on, among other things, a truce on election day on 10 March. In the legislative election, the ARENA Party again won a majority of seats. After the elections, the government and the FMLN agreed to start a new round of negotiations, in Mexico City on 4 April. In a joint statement made a week after the election, the United States and the Soviet Union had made it clear that they supported a negotiated settlement in El Salvador. On

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27 April, the government and the FMLN announced that they had reached agreement on constitutional amendments that would limit the powers of the armed forces and change the judicial system and the electoral process.

A new round of negotiations began on 25 May 1991 amid increasing tensions between the government and the rebels and continuing clashes between the army and the rebels. With the situation worsening, President Bush of the United States announced on 27 June that military aid to El Salvador would be restored. Despite the violence, a new round of negotiations between the Salvadorean government and the FMLN began on 9 July.

In order to give new life to the negotiations, the United States and the Soviet Union asked the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar, to intervene. He met with representatives of the FMLN and of the Salvadoran government on 16 September 1991 and proposed a peace plan. After a few days of negotiations, the FMLN and Salvadoran government representatives signed an agreement in New York on 25 September indicating the measures to be taken to end the civil war. Among other things, the agreement would allow FMLN rebels to become members of a new civilian police force and would allow their families to keep lands they have occupied in rebel-held zones. A formal cease-fire still proved elusive, but, in a bid to accelerate the negotiations, the FMLN announced a unilateral cease-fire on 14 November 1991.

Representatives of the FMLN and the Salvadoran government resumed negotiations in New York on 16 December 1991. In a bid to obtain a peace accord before the end of his mandate as Secretary General of the UN, Javier Perez de Cuellar put considerable pressure on the negotiators. The tactic worked; just before midnight on 31 December 1991, when de Cuellar's mandate was slated to end, the FMLN and Salvadoran government representatives announced that they had reached agreement on a peace accord. A few details still had to be negotiated, but this was done in time for the formal signing of the peace accord by representatives of the Salvadoran government and the FMLN in Mexico City on 16 January 1992.

The signing of the peace accord put an end to a civil war which has lasted for some 12 years and which has cost the lives of at least

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75,000 persons. The peace accord provides for the reform of the judicial and electoral systems in El Salvador and establishes safeguards against human-rights abuses. Over a nine-month period, both the government and the FMLN will reduce their military forces and a new national civil police will be established. The government agreed to give land to peasants in FMLN-occupied areas. One of the most important elements of the peace accord, the formal cease-fire, which took effect on 1 February 1992, is being monitored by a UN peacekeeping force of some 1,100 soldiers, with Canada being the second biggest contributor of personnel.

In the weeks following the signing of the accord, there were a few problems in the implementation of some provisions, notably the allocation of lands. The most serious problem was the situation in the camps into which FMLN members were moving in accordance with the provisions of the ceasefire agreement. The lack of sanitary facilities and housing in the camps threatened to delay the concentration of the 7,500 FMLN troops and possibly disrupt the peace process. In response to requests for assistance, Canada announced on 8 March 1992 that it would provide $200,000 in emergency aid to improve the sanitary facilities. Other countries, however, were slow to provide aid. The conditions in the FMLN camps increased tensions between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government and there are constant fears that the peace process might break down. Despite some delays, however, the peace process still appears to be on course.

c) Region As A Whole

With the end of the conflict in El Salvador, tensions between the countries in the region have reduced considerably and there is more optimism that Central Americans will be able to concentrate on establishing real peace in their area and generating economic prosperity. The Central American countries are re-establishing the common market which had considerable success before the 1980s. Their representatives met in January 1991 with Mexican officials to discuss proposals for a free trade arrangement with Mexico. In March, the Foreign Ministers of the Central American countries met with those of Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia and with officials of the European Community to discuss an agreement, similar

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to that between the Community and the Andean countries, which would reduce tariffs on Central American products in the European market.

On 15-17 July 1991, the five Central American presidents met in San Salvador where they agreed that there was now no major obstacle to the signing of free trade agreements between their countries. Indeed, Guatemala and El Salvador had already signed a bilateral agreement and the President of Venezuela was present at the meeting to sign a free trade agreement with the Central American countries. The five presidents also agreed to let Panama participate in regional discussions, to re-establish the Organization of Central American States and to hold elections within three years for the regional parliament which had been agreed to at the Esquipulas meeting in May 1986.

There is a danger, however, that, because the superpowers are no longer deeply involved in the region, the international community may now ignore the problems there, particularly the strong influence of the military on governments in most countries, continuing abuse of human rights, and the widespread poverty, which if untreated will create new turmoil. With the international community now preoccupied with the provision of humanitarian and economic aid to the republics that used to be part of the Soviet Union, Central America may not receive all the economic aid it needs for reconstruction after a decade of conflict. It is estimated that El Salvador alone would need $2 billion for its reconstruction. Low world commodity prices and the recession in the Western world will affect the region's exports and slow economic growth. In short, despite recent positive developments, the Central American region still faces serious problems, which the international community cannot afford to ignore.

PARLIAMENTARY ACTION

A. Support for the Contadora Initiative

Canadian parliamentarians have been concerned for a number of years about conflicts in Central America and the international tensions

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resulting from them. In 1982 a House of Commons committee studying Canada's relations with Latin America pointed out that rivalry between the superpowers made it more difficult to solve the economic and social problems which are at the root of the conflict in Central America. The Canadian government shared this viewpoint and quickly supported the Contadora peace initiative, one of whose main objectives was to limit the interference of the superpowers. In 1985 and 1986 Prime Minister Mulroney and the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, reiterated on many occasions the government's firm and unequivocal support for the Contadora initiative. At the same time the Joint Special Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on Canada's External Relations studied at length the question of Central America, receiving more briefs from experts and members of the general public on that subject than on any other. In its report of June 1986, the Special Joint Committee pointed out that, while maintaining its support for the Contadora initiative, Canada must also continue to encourage respect for human rights in Central American countries and help refugees from the region.

Despite the deadlock prevailing in early 1987, Canadian parliamentarians did not give up hope, although they were concerned about U.S. military assistance to the Contras in Nicaragua. Following an attack by the Contras in May against an aid project sponsored by Canadians, the Secretary of State for External Affairs told the House of his serious concerns regarding the actions of the Contras: however, he resisted opposition demands for more severe criticism of the U.S. policy of support for the Contras, stating on 29 June 1987 that he was relying instead on peace initiatives.

B. Reactions to the Esquipulas II Accord

Parliament subsequently debated two motions on Central America. The first, by the Member for Spadina, Dan Heap, focused on the timeliness of promoting peace in Central America. It was debated by the House on 1 September 1987. The second, by the Member for New Westminster-Coquitlam, Pauline Jewett, dealt with the advisability of signing the protocol of the Contadora draft treaty. It was debated on 10 September.

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Both motions had been submitted before the signing of the Esquipulas II Accord in August 1987, but debate in each case was on the new situation and clearly demonstrated that all parties favoured the new agreement and wanted Canada to provide whatever assistance the people of Central America might request from it. During the same month some MPs went to Nicaragua and on their return expressed concern about Contra activities.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs visited the region in November 1987 to discuss with the Central American presidents the role Canada might play in the peace process. Mr. Clark gave the House a report of his visit on 2 December: he said he was confident that the Central American presidents intended to honour their commitments, but he indicated the difficulties involved in developing a verification and control mechanism. He also reiterated the fundamental principles of Canadian policy in Central America, his opposition to the intervention of third parties, and his support for a peace process which would make it possible to solve the economic and social problems that lie at the heart of the conflicts in the region. Generally, the opposition parties accepted the government viewpoint but they did advocate stronger denunciation of American aid to the Contras and an increase in aid to the region. However, they supported the government proposal that a parliamentary committee study the situation in Central America with a view to examining and encouraging the peace process.

C. The Special Committee of the House of Commons

On 29 January 1988, the establishment of the Special Committee of the House of Commons on the Peace Process in Central America was announced. It comprised five MPs from the three parties and was chaired by the Hon. John Bosley. The Special Committee was to examine how the provisions of the Esquipulas II Accord were implemented and how Canada could contribute to the peace process. On 24 March, after the Sapoa agreement was signed, the Chairman of the Special Committee presented a motion to the House expressing the hope that the peace process would lead to a permanent resolution of the conflicts in Nicaragua and Central America in general. The motion was adopted unanimously.

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While the situation was changing in Central America, the Special Committee continued to meet and visited the region from 9 to 18 May. On 5 July the Committee tabled a report to the House, the conclusions and recommendations of which were unanimous. The Special Committee stated that Canada should do everything it could to help Central American countries to find peace, while at the same time respecting the views of the countries concerned, and that it should also encourage the international community to do likewise. It recommended that Canada take part in the setting up of a verification mechanism, while also ensuring that its mandate was clearly defined. It also urged Canada to set up an international institute for human rights and democratic advancement (which the government did on 12 August 1988), to help supervise elections and to promote the establishment of a regional parliament. Canada should also allocate approximately $100 million in aid, over a five-year period, to promote economic development and help refugees, and Canadian representation in the region should be enhanced.

On 23 September 1988, the Secretary of State for External Affairs commented on the report of the Special Committee in a letter to the Chairman. Mr. Clark reiterated that Canada was prepared to participate in the development of a verification mechanism, while taking account of the opinions of the governments in the region. He also indicated his agreement with most of the recommendations in the report, particularly the one to grant $100 million in aid for reconstruction and development in the region, although he suggested the amount should be spread over six years rather than five. However, while recognizing the need to strengthen diplomatic representation in the region, Mr. Clark indicated that human resource and financial restrictions made it impossible for the moment to open as many missions as the Special Committee wished.

D. Latest Developments

The situation in Central America continues to concern Members of Parliament. Some Members met in February 1989 with representatives of the FMLN rebels of El Salvador who were in Ottawa seeking support for their peace proposals. Some Members travelled to El Salvador to

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observe the 19 March elections. In early April, Members welcomed President Oscar Arias Sanchez of Costa Rica during his trip to Ottawa, where he met with the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for External Affairs and other officials to discuss the peace process and economic developments in Costa Rica.

In late June 1989, members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade met with Dr. Leonel Arguello, Magistrate of the Nicaraguan Supreme Electoral Council, during his visit to Ottawa, to discuss Canadian assistance to the electoral process in Nicaragua.

The outburst of violence in El Salvador in November 1989 was of great concern to Members of Parliament. Questions were raised in the House concerning United States policies on El Salvador, Canada's role in efforts to bring an end to the conflict, Canada's intention to join the Organization of American States (OAS), and the treatment of Canadian aid workers during violent clashes in San Salvador. The case of Karen Ridd of Winnipeg, a Peace Brigades International volunteer who was arrested by Salvadorean authorities and later released, attracted considerable attention. The House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade examined the situation in El Salvador and questioned the Salvadorean Deputy Foreign Minister, Ricardo Valdivieso, during one of its December meetings. The Committee tabled a report in the House on 20 December 1989; this deplored the death threats made against Karen Ridd's family and the export to Canada of such Salvadorean death squad tactics.

On 9 February 1990, the Minister of National Defence tabled in the House of Commons an Order in Council confirming Canada's participation in ONUCA. The Minister and representatives of both opposition parties stated that they were pleased to see Canada contributing to the peace process in Central America and expressed hope for lasting peace in the region.

In February 1992, the Sub-committee on Development and Human Rights of the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on External Affairs and International Trade passed a motion calling on Canada to support actions by the UN Human Rights Commission to condemn the poor human rights record in Guatemala.

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CHRONOLOGY

8-9 January 1983 - The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia and Panama launched the Contadora peace initiative.

20 February 1984 - Canada made a concrete offer of aid to the peace process, which could take the form of a peacekeeping force.

24-25 May 1986 - The five Central American presidents, meeting at Esquipulas, Guatemala, failed to agree on the Contadora draft treaty, but accept the proposal for a regional parliament.

15 February 1987 - The Central American Presidents, with the exception of the President of Nicaragua, met in San José, Costa Rica, to study the peace plan proposed by President Arias of Costa Rica. They invited Nicaragua to take part in a conference on peace in the region.

6-7 August 1987 - The five Central American presidents signed a regional peace agreement based on the Arias plan, known as the Esquipulas II Accord.

5 November 1987 - At the last minute, Nicaragua complied with the deadline set by the accord by agreeing to negotiate a cease-fire with the Contra leaders.

22 November 1987 - The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, visited Central America to meet the Central American presidents.

15-16 January 1988 - The five Central American presidents met to assess the measures taken under the Esquipulas II Accord. Nicaragua's announced its intention to lift the state of emergency and begin direct negotiations with the Contras ensured that the peace process would continue.

23 March 1988 - The Sandinista government and the Contras signed a 60-day cease-fire agreement in Sapoa, Nicaragua.

7 April 1988 - The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the five Central American countries unofficially invited Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany and Spain to develop a verification and control mechanism.

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9 February 1989 - The Central American foreign ministers formally requested the United Nations to establish a peacekeeping force for their region.

13-14 February 1989 - The five Central American presidents met in Costa Del Sol in El Salvador where they agreed to demobilize the Contras based in Honduras in exchange for Nicaragua's commitment to implement political reforms.

17 March 1989 - The Nicaraguan government freed 1,894 former members of the National Guard and announced electoral reforms in keeping with commitments made at the Costa Del Sol meeting.

19 March 1989 - Alfredo Cristiani of ARENA party won the presidential elections in El Salvador.

7 August 1989 - The five Central American presidents met in Tela, Honduras, where they adopted a plan for the demobilization of the Contras.

1 September 1989 - The Secretary of State for External Affairs announced that Canadian experts would participate in a reconnaissance mission to prepare for the deployment of ONUCA, the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (Spanish acronym).

15 September 1989 - The FMLN and the Salvadorean government announced that they had reached agreement on a peace negotiation procedure which included monthly meetings.

11 November 1989 - FMLN guerrillas attacked San Salvador, retreating from the capital many days later after pitched battles with the army.

11-12 December 1989 - The five Central American presidents met in San Isidro de Coronado, Costa Rica, where they agreed on a declaration which called for an end to violence in the area and which reaffirmed the role of the United Nations in the peace process.

25 February 1990 - The Nicaraguan elections produced a stunning upset, with Mrs. Chamorro defeating President Ortega and the National Opposition Union (UNO) receiving more votes than the Sandinistas.

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13 March 1990 - President Bush announced that the United States was lifting its economic embargo against Nicaragua.

4 April 1990 - Representatives of the Salvadorean government and of the FMLN met in Geneva, where they agreed to begin new negotiations to end the conflict in El Salvador.

19 April 1990 - The Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the Contra rebels signed a cease-fire agreement which called for the complete demobilization of the rebels by 10 June.

25 April 1990 - Violetta Barrios de Chamorro was sworn in as president of Nicaragua and a new government replaced the Sandinista regime.

28 June 1990 - The Contra leaders surrendered their weapons to President Chamorro, more or less putting an end to the civil war in Nicaragua.

31 August 1990 - Representatives from the Guatemalan coordinating committee of agricultural, commercial, industrial and financial associations and from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, a rebel group, met in Ottawa to find ways of ending the civil war in Guatemala.

7 December 1990 - Following a request from the United Nations, the Minister of National Defence announced that in view of the reduction in regional tensions, Canadian Forces personnel involved with ONUCA would return to Canada.

6 January 1991 - Jorge Serrano was elected president of Guatemala in the second round of the presidential elections.

10 March 1991 - The ARENA Party retained its majority in the Salvadorean legislative elections amid claims of electoral fraud.

18-19 March 1991 - Foreign Ministers and officials from Central America, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and the European Community met to discuss the reduction of tariffs on Central American goods in the European market.

27 April 1991 - Representatives of the government of El Salvador and the FMLN announced in Mexico that they had reached agreement on constitu-

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tional reforms, paving the way for negotiations on a final cease-fire.

27 June 1991 - President Bush of the United States announced that military aid to El Salvador would be restored.

15-17 July 1991 - The five Central American presidents met in San Salvador and agreed to let Panama join their regional structures, reactivate the Organization of Central American States and hold elections for the regional parliament within three years.

25 July 1991 - Representatives of the Guatemalan government and the Guatemalan rebel group signed an agreement calling for measures to ensure democracy.

16 September 1991 - The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar, proposed a peace plan in meetings with representatives of the FMLN and of the Salvadoran government.

25 September 1991 - Representatives of the FMLN and of the Salvadorean government signed in New York an agreement on measures to put an end to the civil war.

28 September 1991 - During a controversial trial, two Salvadoran army officers were convicted of the 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests; seven soldiers were acquitted.

14 November 1991 - The FMLN in El Salvador announced a unilateral cease-fire in a bid to accelerate the negotiation of a formal cease-fire.

31 December 1991 - With the assistance of United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, representatives of the Salvadoran government and of the FMLN reached agreement on a peace accord.

16 January 1992 - Representatives of the Salvadoran government and of the FMLN in Mexico City signed the formal agreement putting an end to the civil war.

21 January 1992 - The Associate Minister of National Defence, Mary Collins, met with President Cristiani of El Salvador to indicate Canada's support for the peace accord.

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1 February 1992 - In accordance with the peace accord, a formal cease-fire came into effect in El Salvador. A UN peacekeeping force, which includes many Canadian soldiers, was put in place to monitor the cease-fire.

19 February 1992 - A UN report condemned Guatemala's poor human rights record.

8 March 1992 - Canada provided $200,000 in emergency aid for the FMLN camps established under the ceasefire agreement.

9 April 1992 - The European Parliament passed a resolution protesting against frequent murders and the torture of street children in Guatemala.

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